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AUTHOR Hyde, Diana DeShazo
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ABSTRACT

This practicum sought to increase the opportunities for 17 first-grade students to write for real, human reasons and in natural circumstances. They were to use writing as a natural and acceptable outlet for expression, and to conceive of their writing as an extension of themselves. Each day a name was drawn to take home a stuffed bear, which served as a motivation companion for writing; the next day, the bear was brought back and the student wrote a story of his/her adventures with the bear. The student then sat in the Author's Chair, put on the Author's Cap, and read his/her story. This promoted voluntary involvement in literacy activities in students' free time, and increased writing output. Students also, in a collaborative learning venture, put together a whole-class book every month. There was increased oral reading to the students in different registers of language. Checklists were kept in each student's personal writing folder. The actual writing period was expanded to allow for all components of writing to take place. At the end of implementation, 14 of the 17 students were writing at least one page a day (many were writing more than that); the quality of students' writing had risen noticeably; students were collaboratively putting together one book a week; and the use of "book language" was common. (Appendixes contain a conference checklist and a behavioral objectives rating scale.) (Author/SR)

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Supporting First Graders' Growth as Writers Through Whole-Language Strategies

by

Diana DeShazo Hyde

Cluster 34

Report

A Practicum I Report presented
to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Education.

NOVA UNIVERSITY

1990

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PRACTICUM APPROVAL SHEET

This practicum took place as described.

Verifier: Karen Henderson D.H.

First Grade Teacher
Title
324 SE Elliott Road
Fort Walton Beach, Florida 32548
Address

June 18, 1990
Date

This practicum report was submitted by Diana DeShazo Hyde under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova University.

Approved:

7-7-90
Date of Final Approval of Report

William Anderson
William Anderson, Ed.D., Adviser

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Thank you seems hardly sufficient to my mentor in this project, Dr. William Anderson; without his patient guidance and understanding from the very beginning, this practicum would never have taken place. When the going was rough, he was there with a positive attitude and encouragement.

A big thank you to my friend Bob Haselman, who knows the floor plan of every library in this area! He would not let me quit, and saw that I always had nickels for the copy machine.

More appreciation than I can express to Karen Henderson, who allowed me to use her classroom and her students; she went out of her way to be helpful.

Thank you to Terry Hecker, the principal of the school. She is very much the professional; the words of encouragement from her were truly worth gold. Everyone at her school, especially the resource people, were so kind to me and always wanted to know if I needed anything. I could not have chosen a better group of people with whom to work.

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ABSTRACT

Supporting First Graders' Growth as Writers Through Whole-Language Strategies. Fort Walton Beach, Florida, 1990: Practicum I Report, Nova University, Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies. Descriptors: Whole-Language/ First Grade Writing/Holistic/Inventive Spelling/Pretend Reading/Roleplaying/Classroom Publishing/Author's Chair/ Collaborative Learning/Elementary Literacy/Elementary Authors/Writing Process.

This practicum sought to increase the opportunities first grade students have to write for real, human reasons and in natural circumstances. They were to use writing as a natural and acceptable outlet for expression, and to conceive their writing as an extension of themselves.

Each day a name was drawn to take home a stuffed bear, which served as a motivation companion for writing; the next day, the bear was brought back and the student wrote a story of his/her adventures with the bear. The student then sat in the Author's Chair, put on the Author's Cap, and read his/her story. This promoted voluntary involvement in literacy activities in students' free time, and increased writing output. Students were also, in a collaborative learning venture, putting together a whole-class book every month. There was increased oral reading to the students in different registers of language. A record on each student was kept via a checklist in each student's personal writing folder. The actual writing period was expanded to allow for all components of writing to take place.

Results of the practicum far exceeded those hoped for by the author. At the end of implementation, fourteen of the seventeen students in the class were writing at least one page a day (and many, more than that), the quality of students' writings had noticeably risen, students were collaborativly putting together one book a week, and the use of "book language" was common.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Description of Work Setting and Community

The author worked in a thirty-year old elementary school with an enrollment of 623 students, in a low to middle socioeconomic neighborhood. The economy in this area is based on the military and the tourist industries. The military presents a big influence, as there are four military bases within a forty-five mile radius. Most of the students live in rental housing and trailer parks.

The school physical plant was built in the late 1950's in the shape of five wings; classrooms are housed in each wing. The school was opened in 1960 and today employs thirty-four teachers, one guidance counselor, one media specialist, six lunchroom personnel, and eight support staff. There were four sections of kindergarten, first grade, and second grade, and three sections each of third grade, fourth grade, fifth grade, and sixth grade.

The mascot of the school is the playful, yet intelligent, dolphin; the school colors are blue and white. There is a Student-Parent Handbook given out at the beginning of the school year. This handbook is very comprehensive in that it covers all aspects of the school,

leaving as little as possible to chance. Any major decisions or arbitrations that have to be made beyond the handbook are referred to the principal, who maintains a visible presence and a strong professional attitude.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

The work setting was a word-rich self-contained first grade classroom following a traditional subject area curriculum. The students were provided motivation for writing through tactile-kinesthetic finger plays and pre-writing activities and were given a time in which to write in their journals each day.

Words were in evidence throughout the room, in many creative forms of display. Spelling words were in a list on the wall, and were changed every week. Reading vocabulary words, taken from the stories in the basal readers, were on display on a word chart. All learning centers were captioned, with lists of students under each day of the week, according to which days students were assigned to which centers. Words were used in seasonal displays on the bulletin boards and walls. Poems on a large flip chart were kept on display and referred to often. The reading/writing center contained a variety of books of children's literature and a few books authored by first

grade students. Instructions for assignments were printed on the chalkboard before the students arrived and were left there most of the day. Sentence strips and word cards were used in some learning centers. Classroom supply boxes were labelled.

A traditional subject-area curriculum, along with the traditional testing schedule, was followed. Mathematics and language arts (English, spelling, reading) were emphasized in the morning period; science, social studies, health, physical education, music, and art were attended to in the afternoon period until one forty-five P.M., when school is out.

A scope and sequence chart of grade-level skills was used by the teacher to assess student progress. Standardized and teacher-made tests were routinely used to report student progress on a time schedule of once every six weeks, using grade assignments ranging from S, satisfactory, through U, unsatisfactory.

School guidelines required that opportunities and support for optimum success for all students must be provided, and instructional direction needs to be in the form of instructional support. Although manipulative, tactile-kinesthetic experiences were provided for in learning centers, children needed more opportunities to

engage in peer tutoring and collaborative learning.

Students were viewed as capable learners and were provided some motivation activities for writing, as follows: Journal writing (with teacher-selected topic), a reading/writing center, subject-oriented learning centers, finger plays, board games, manipulative counting activities, and oral reading by the teacher.

The author worked with the entire enrollment (seventeen students) of one first grade class, and their teacher. One student was repeating first grade because he tested poorly in basic reading skills and did not complete the designated reading level. This was his first year in this teacher's room.

The racial mix of the class consisted of one black and the remainder Caucasian.

Resource people were actively involved as a source of aid and motivation for the teacher. The primary resource education program (prep) person was especially helpful in individualizing teaching ideas. The media specialist was very active in promoting children's literature.

There is a Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO), whose members were encouraged by the school principal to donate volunteer hours. A sign-in sheet was on the wall

in the office, stating who came, the type of work they came to do, the teacher involved, the dates, and the times. Parents were encouraged to volunteer on a scheduled basis, but they were not turned away, if scheduling was not possible.

The regular classroom teacher actively participated in in-service seminars concerning literacy. She was, at that time, enrolled in a whole language class being taught one night a week at this school.

The author's role in the classroom was that of an adjunct teacher working in unison with the classroom teacher, to achieve goals set for writing. The author was physically present in the classroom one-half of each school day for three months. She was stationed near the reading/writing center, so as to be in close proximity to students the entire time she was there. She was quietly instructive and supportive in helping students with their writing. She also unobtrusively monitored students' behavior in reading and writing, while keeping a record of student-author writing conferences. The author and the classroom teacher worked "hand-in-hand" reinforcing each other in motivating students.

The author met with the Superintendent and the Curriculum Director of the school district, and

discussed with them their philosophy toward whole language. Last year, and continuing into this year, appointed committees have met and are meeting to change the county's phonics-bound traditional approach to reading, by adopting a whole language textbook series. Each school in the county is allowed a lot of freedom in the books that they use in their reading and writing curriculum. The county tends to gravitate toward school-based management.

The teacher the author worked with was very flexible and had her students' interests foremost in her work. She carries a master's degree in elementary education and continues to update and keep abreast of innovations in education. In addition, she offered suggestions and volunteered materials and time.

The author chose to do her practicum in this particular school because the principal and faculty impressed her as being very open and receptive to professional assistance. The principal is very knowledgeable about the needs of her school and faculty.

CHAPTER II

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

The problem was that first grade students had little opportunity to write for real, human reasons and in natural circumstances. Students had not been given opportunities to use writing as a natural and acceptable outlet for expression. Writing did not "come naturally" for them; they did not conceive their writing as an extension of themselves. Students exhibited uncertainty and timidity when asked to write; they appeared too concerned about the mechanics of writing (spelling, letter formation, spacing), therefore content of writing suffered; they had problems staying "on task" while attempting to write; they did not seem to be making improvements in their writing; the attitudes of students toward writing was mostly negative. Students had not had sufficient opportunities to use writing as a viable tool in their education.

Students did not seem to appreciate the value of writing in "real life." They regarded writing as a chore, a task to avoid.

Problem Documentation

The author proved this problem was real by systematic observations of the students in the classroom, keeping records of reading and writing behaviors. A record was kept of "book language" students exhibited throughout the day, and it was discovered that fewer than ten percent of the class voluntarily used "book language" ("Once upon a time, ever after, the end"). During a typical classroom day, the author observed that students were given only a period of fifteen minutes in which to read aloud and discuss what they had written; a separate block of fifteen minutes was provided for the actual pencil-to-paper writing; these blocks of time did not naturally flow into each other, as they were scheduled to be separate.

In keeping a record of on-task behavior in writing, the author found that there were three students who, although they demonstrated abilities in other areas, over a period of six writing periods of fifteen minutes each, they had actually written on paper a total of only ten words each. During writing periods they appeared fidgety and exhibited distracting and time-wasting habits.

Students were assigned topics for writing, and were not allowed to collaborate with one another. One block of time was designated for strictly pencil-to-paper writing; the following fifteen minute block of writing time was for students to read aloud what they had written and participate in class discussion of it.

Students were read to once a day, every day, for a period of fifteen minutes after lunch, always from stories with a fairy tale format.

In observing the attitudes of students toward writing (on a scale using facial expressions and body language), the author found that students lacked a sense of ownership and responsibility for their writing when they simply turned it in and did not hear or see feedback concerning their writing.

Causative Analysis

The author cites several causes of the problem. Chief among them is the fact that students had not been given functional reasons for writing. "Why should I write?" This is indeed a good question, one that is too often not answered. Functional, reasonable reasons for writing should be given to the students. Some reasons are: Labelling, writing letters, taking down messages, making lists, writing stories.

Another cause was the misconception that the writing period consisted of pencil-to-paper activity only. During the time allotted for writing, students needed time to think, muse, rehearse a topic, discuss it with their peers, illustrate, revise and read aloud what they had written.

Students appeared too concerned about the mechanics of writing (spelling, letter formation, spacing), therefore the content of their writing suffered; they didn't feel free to be fluent. They also were not interested in writing because they felt they had nothing to write about.

Students did not feel writing was a viable tool because they had been given no opportunities to use it as such. They had been given topics and story starters instead of being helped to choose their own, by interacting with each other; interaction between students had been suppressed in the interest of "quietness."

Students were read to for only fifteen minutes once a day, and were not exposed to different registers of language, which hindered them in developing their own storehouse of language.

Other than their journals, there was little writing continuity the students could see, and little permanence to their work.

Professionals emphasize the fact that writing should not be an isolated subject, but should be incorporated into the lives of students so that it becomes a natural way of expressing themselves. They purport that reading and writing develop together and are interdependent, and they are considered to be part of the social interactions of students, even while students are perceiving these skills each in his/her own way. The sequence of the development of oral language parallels the sequence of the development of written language (Fields, 1988). Student interactions affect their writing because the classroom furnishes a socially alive environment which has impact upon each person within it (Heap, 1989). Students inherently possess an inner rhythm and style which needs to be expressed through the processes of reading and writing (Ashton-Warner, 1963).

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

The support the literature provides is in agreement with the author that students need support and guidance for discovery in their writing. The teacher should provide time, materials, and structure for the students' writing (including talking, reading, and listening) and

use this as a springboard for further learning (Calkins, 1986). The role of the teacher is much like the architect's, in that he/she is responsible for designing an environment which is conducive and catalystic to learning; an environment in which students are discovering knowledge "on their own" and feel comfortable about that because they know help is there when needed. When students are simply guided by the teacher, they solve problems, answer questions, and discover information from their past experiences (Graves, 1983). From their own personal experiences, students know what they want to write and they have their own inimitable styles and perceptions (Ashton-Warner, 1963); they need help and guidance in bringing out these qualities, which are, after all, natural. From the moment students find out their "scrawly shapes" mean something, they seem to use repeatedly their own inherent style, knowing more about what they are writing than the teacher does (Ashton-Warner, 1963).

In writing, students will use, unconsciously, the two processes of synthesizing letters, words, and sentences: reading (the breaking down process of visual analysis) and writing (the building up process of making words out of letters). Students teach themselves a

sound sequence analysis strategy. For example, visual learning occurs for those clusters of letters which consistently represent certain sounds; they generalize this knowledge (Clay, 1979).

Literature reveals that the basic approach of educators toward the teaching of writing has been at fault. The emphasis in writing has been on the wrong thing. Teachers have historically stressed handwriting, the formation of letters, spelling (correctly), and the position of words (on a straight line, words not running together). Content has been neglected. Students have not been encouraged to write to identify themselves and express themselves. Real reasons for writing have not been discussed with the students, as writing conferences between students and teachers have been nonexistent, in many cases; topics in writing have been assigned. The past experiences (and present, too) of students have been generally ignored as subjects for writing.

Teachers are unsure of how to structure the environment to support growth in writing. They do not realize that a word-rich environment should contain an array of different usages of language, from labelling shelves to writing poetry to choral speaking. Motivation for writing is entertwined in all the activities going on in the classroom. It is not a separate subject.

The most creative environments are not those in which everything is always changing and different; they are the most predictable and consistent ones: The scholar's library, the researcher's laboratory, the artist's studio. These places are kept predictable and simple because the work at hand is so unpredictable and complex (Calkins, 1986).

Teachers have failed to observe individual student's reading and writing behaviors, in order to determine where each one is in his/her development of reading and writing. Some students may be in the rehearsal stage, where they need help in defining or choosing a topic; others may be ready to edit their work. Peer conferences should be encouraged in reading and writing behaviors, for they play an important part in the individual's development of reading and writing.

Collaborative publishing of students' work has not been considered a major concern in education. When students fulfill their primal need to write, and "publish" their own work, they gain immeasurable degrees of self-esteem and self-confidence, plus a heightened awareness of the advantages of working together.

In the field of education, well-intentioned teachers have been going about their business of teaching subjects,

and the children watch. Psychology does not endorse this, maintaining that students must be involved for real learning to take place. Stress on the students, caused by various requirements to recall memorized information and the students' inability to synthesize the information he/she has been exposed to, has an adverse effect on students' mental health. In the fields of business, science, mathematics, and generally in life, it is important for one to be able to synthesize information learned. This is an indication of higher level thinking (Bloom's taxonomy). In the author's search of the literature, the topical areas covered include education, psychology, health, business, medical, science, and mathematics.

CHAPTER III

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The following goals and expectations were projected for this practicum.

First grade children will gain opportunities for writing in natural circumstances and for real human reasons. The author's goal was to provide opportunities and positive motivation concerning expressive writing to the point that writing becomes a natural and welcome way for students to express ideas and communicate. Children are naturally inclined to want to say and write: "This is me; I am a person; I have a story." Educators have, however, set up roadblocks to stifle children's natural inclinations to write by demanding correct letter formation, spacing, and spelling. The author intended to encourage content through encouraging inventive spelling, voice (students "talk" their way through their writing), and conferencing with the teacher and peers.

The environment was structured in a predictable and consistent way so that the natural circumstances would be those that were conducive to writing. This was done with the strong conviction that, sometimes beneath

layers of resistance, students want to write, primarily for three real human reasons:

1. The need to identify and/or assert oneself.
2. The need to express one's feelings.
3. The need to communicate.

It was the author's hope that students would come to comprehend their writing as part of themselves, while strengthening a positive attitude toward writing.

The following behavioral objectives were projected for this practicum.

Behavioral Objectives

The author's specific objectives were:

1. When given free time, ninety percent of the students will voluntarily choose to participate in the reading/writing center, involving themselves in literacy activities, such as storytelling, making books, roleplaying, writing letters and lists, and illustrating stories.

2. The actual writing period will be expanded from thirty minutes (two fifteen minute periods) to sixty minutes a day, allowing time for reading aloud and discussion of students' writing.

3. By the end of the implementation period, the three students whose writing output averaged less than two words per fifteen minute writing period, will be producing at least five times that amount in each writing period of sixty minutes each.

4. During a daily writing period of sixty minutes duration, students will routinely confer with one another, having freedom of

choice concerning a writing topic, and producing at least one page of writing each.

5. The time the students are read to will be increased from fifteen minutes once a day to fifteen minutes twice a day, with the types of selections being varied: Poetry, rhymes, jokes, biographies, recipes, family and school stories, newspapers, informational stories, fairy tales, and children's literature.

6. A folder will be maintained by the author for each child, containing a progressive accumulation of the student's work over the three month implementation period and also a conference check-off list, recording for the student: topics written on, durations of the writings, sharing done, and the overall tone of each conference.

Measurement of Objectives

Systematic observation of the students gave a very accurate picture of what they actually did in their free time in learning centers; they were also closely observed during their reading/writing time. The author recorded these observations in a journal, which she wrote in daily. Progress in reading and writing was immediately made note of. Some comments in the journal are:

> It is Day one of the practicum and already three students have crowded around the Author's Chair to hear an author read her just-finished story!

Sharing (read his/her story to someone).

\+ Good Conference

\- Poor Conference

There was space on the checklist for each day of the three months; naturally, some days were blank, but, as it turned out, not many.

A behavioral objectives rating scale was designed by the author to measure progress being made during the three months. It was also used at the end of implementation to see to what extent objectives had been met.

The behavioral objectives were listed, verbatim, on the paper. Across from each objective was a row of five boxes, with a progress key ranging from 1=Awful to 5= Excellent. The author put the number she felt had been accomplished for each objective. The classroom teacher also filled out this rating scale.

This scale was used more than once, as we guaged our progress in the practicum; much fruitful discussion was produced. It turned out to be an excellent "self-measurement" for our classroom and became our springboard for improvement.

CHAPTER IV

SOLUTION STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

The problem was first grade children had little little opportunity to write for real, human reasons and in natural circumstances.

This problem has been faced by many professionals as, traditionally, teaching writing has been teaching the mechanics of handwriting and has had little to do with content and personal experiences. Topics have generally been assigned, and creativeness in writing has usually been narrowly defined with story starters. As the author has gleaned from the literature, the whole language approach has been discovered, researched, field-tested, and written about as a successful method of learning to read and write.

According to the literature, the general consensus is that teaching writing must become more like coaching a sport and less like presenting information. Children come to school wanting to write, but needing guidance; they know that particular marks placed in certain

sequence make a recognizable pattern (Clay, 1979), but they do not know how to organize these thoughts into meaningful units.

Past experiences of the student should be used, as they provide a frame of reference upon which the student may base his/her writing (Clay, 1979). These are things the student is an authority on; his/her actual personality is shaped by background experiences.

Students need to be taught that expressive writing is thinking on paper (Fulwiler, 1981). This is why Elbow, in Writing Without Teachers, believes in simply writing nonsensically as a good start until inspiration takes over and valuable thoughts begin to flow.

Writing should be emphasized in early education with more emphasis placed on pre-writing skills (Bredenkamp, 1987). Pre-writing covers a wide spectrum of experiences, some of which are: dramatizing stories, telling stories, role-playing, drawing, reciting poetry, singing, listening to tapes, choral sayings, class discussions, and manipulating plastic letters.

Teachers should help children choose topics, organize the classroom for writing, write with the children, publish writing in the classroom, surround the children with literature, and make the school day

encourage writing (Graves, 1983). Probably the most basic action to take first would be to structure the environment so that it supports growth in writing. In doing this, the environment must be made and kept predictable and simple because writing is unpredictable and complex. After this is done, the following steps are made easier.

Students must be given time and opportunity to express themselves on paper (Meagher, 1986). Musing, thinking, rehearsal, and talking all play a part in the time and opportunity given for writing. Actual pencil-to-paper activity may take less time than the other parts of writing. Making time for opportunities for peer conferences is also a valuable contribution to writing.

Students need to be taught that it is through "musing, drafting, revising, talking, and musing some more" that writers find out what they want to say (Calkins, 1986). Calkins (1986) divides writing into rehearsal, drafting, revision, and editing. First graders generally rehearse for writing by drawing; with little preplanning in mind, the first grader's drawing will "turn into" something, which he/she will label and use as a focal point in his/her writing. Rehearsal is a very important part of writing, as this is where the ideas come from.

Drawing and scribbling are legitimately pre-writing skills and should be recognized as such (Fields, 1988). Written language development is comparable to oral language development; for example, the babbling and cooing stage can be compared to the scribbling stage. These are first explorations of a language medium. Parents readily accept "ba" for ball in oral language, when the child is just beginning to talk, and praise him/her for it; they should do the same for the child when he/she "scribbles" in a beginning attempt to write.

The teacher should serve as a guide only to bring out what the students wish to say in their writing (Ashton-Warner, 1963). Students come to school with words inside them that mean something to them. When the teacher can help the student to bring out these words and use them, then true learning has occurred. Students want to write.

The author had generated the idea that writing along with the students, and keeping these writings, would serve as a good motivation for students. Modelling writing behaviors helps others to write.

The author felt conferences with students would be important as this is personal contact and an opportunity for feedback concerning writing. Some conferences were

two minutes long, while others were up to fifteen minutes long. A checklist was used for a record of durations of writing, topics written on, sharing done, and the overall tone of each conference. The author conferenced with each student at least twice a week, and sometimes more often.

Guidance in choosing a topic was very casual; most students had no trouble at all, as they liked to write about things that had happened to them. The author encouraged this by asking them to talk about home, day care, friends, trips, pets, school. Lists of topics were not made, personally, because students had no patience for this; once they chose a topic, they wanted to write right now!

Different types of writing were read to the students, exposing them to different registers of written language. The newspaper was one of their favorites.

Description and Justification for Solutions Selected

Author's Chair: A "Director's Chair" covered in red canvas. This Chair served as a focal point for the sharing (reading) of students' writings. It was highly motivating, in that the only time a student was allowed

to sit in the Chair was when he/she had written a story.

Author's Hat: This was the "switch" that turned the oral reading on, once the student was seated in the Author's Chair, ready to read his/her story. It served also as a reminder that serious business was commencing.

Stuffed Bear: The bear was a real entity the students could identify with personally. Those students who were not aggressive or extroverted, and did not make friends easily, were drawn into the excitement of writing. One student (whose name was drawn from a container) took the bear home each night and returned him the next morning; he/she then wrote a story of his/her adventures with the bear.

Conferencing: The author saw the need for impetus and encouragement in students' writings. She felt that conferencing might be the catalyst many students need in order to "get started."

Folders: To keep up momentum and interest in writing and foster a sense of authorship and accomplishment, folders were necessary; they were a way for students to say "Look what I have written."

Checklist: For record keeping purposes, the author found this to be invaluable. It provides a way to know,

almost instantly, exactly how a student is doing in his/her writing.

Oral Reading: This was a must to help students realize that there are many different kinds of writings and that they can produce different kinds, too.

Class-Authored Books: This was to be a check on whole-class progress in the area of collaborative learning. A book of all students' writings (one story from each) was required to be put together at the end of each month. This was also a check on whether the students could synthesize what they had learned.

Report of Action Taken

As a solution strategy, the author used the Author's Chair. The high visibility of the Author's Chair served as an impetus for students to write and complete their work and share it. Students were more motivated to involve themselves in literacy activities during their free time. Students became more inspired to do more and better writing, and were much more likely to confer with one another in collaborative learning, gathering

criticism and opinions concerning their writing. Students were not shy or reluctant to interact with each other, especially concerning solicited advice! Best of all, they were encouraged in going through the whole process of writing.

The Author's Chair resembled a "Director's Chair" covered in red canvas. It was placed in the reading/ writing center, by the window. Students were carefully instructed as to its use. The Chair was to be used for one designated purpose only: To share students' writings. This rule was duly respected and there were no problems with it.

When a student finished his/her piece of writing and wished to share it, the student sat in the Author's Chair. This was the signal to other students that a story was about to start, and they were invited to sit on the floor around the Chair and listen. The student sitting in the Chair was in charge during his/her story.

It was not necessary for everyone in the class to stop what they were doing and listen. If they did want to listen, however, they would gather around the Chair. Of course, it was understood by all, that those students who chose to listen (those who gathered around the Chair) must first have completed required (time-limited) classroom work.

The Author's Hat was actually suggested by the classroom teacher as a reminder to the class that serious business was taking place. It was a gray baseball cap with a printed sign across the front, just over the bill, that read "Author's Hat." The hat was kept hung on the left back corner of the Author's Chair, so that the author automatically reached for the hat and put it on as he/she settled into the Author's Chair. Absolutely no silliness took place while the hat was on in the Author's Chair.

In another solution strategy, the author used a stuffed bear. This bear motivated writing activities across many subjects and helped those students who lacked momentum and self-direction in their writing.

Students were introduced to the stuffed bear by the author, who named the bear Winslow. Winslow went home with one student each afternoon, and spent the night with that student. While the student had the bear in his/her possession, he/she was totally responsible for the welfare of the bear and was also responsible for bringing the bear back to school the next day (after re-consideration of this, the bear even went home with someone on weekends). The bear was returned to the

classroom teacher each morning, who placed him in his assigned place on top of the filing cabinet, until time to go again.

Interactions with the bear were the subject of the student's writings the day he/she brought the bear back. The writing produced by the student chronicled his/her "adventures" with the bear. The author's belief that students would cover many subjects in their writings with bear as their companion, was thoroughly substantiated; among those subjects covered were mathematics, geography, health and nutrition, social studies, reading, and physical education. Students encountered innumerable situations with bear, and looked forward to writing about them and sharing them. Bear provided <u>real reasons</u> to write!

In another solution strategy, the author planned to conference with the students at least twice a week. This was done and extended, as enthusiastic writers desired almost daily conferences (very short ones) and those writers who appeared reluctant needed daily encouragement. The author was careful to keep the checklists daily as progress was speeding along; use of the symbols made for very quick notations.

Each student had an individual folder, in which his/her checklist and samples of work was kept. Therefore, a record of writings was maintained for each child. Conferencing kept up writing momentum and helped the students to gain a sense of authorship; they felt more self-direction and pride in their writings.

The following solution strategy had to do with oral reading. The author took a very active part in choosing literature with different registers of language to read aloud to the students. Oral reading was done by the author once a day for fifteen minutes at a time, in the morning; the classroom teacher did the same in the afternoon. Realizing that students were developing their own storehouses of language, the author read poetry, rhymes, jokes, recipes, family and school stories, newspapers, informational stories, and others.

The author's next solution strategy was extremely successful: A collaborative learning venture. Students were expected to be able to synthesize in putting together a book of their writings; one book at the end of each month. They surpassed this, in that, by the end of the practicum, they were putting together a book a week! Surprisingly, once they got started, this required no urging at all from the author.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Problem and Solution Strategies Utilized

The problem was that first grade students had little opportunity to write for real, human reasons and in natural circumstances. Students had not been given opportunities to use writing as a natural and acceptable outlet for expression.

Solution strategies used by the author were: The Author's Chair, the Author's Hat, a stuffed bear, conferencing, individual file folders, checklists, oral reading, and class-authored books.

Results

Objective

1. When given free time, ninety percent of the students will voluntarily choose to participate in the reading/ writing center, involving themselves in literacy activities, such as storytelling, making books, roleplaying, writing letters and lists, and illustrating stories.	Objective attained.

2. The actual writing period will be expanded from thirty minutes (two fifteen minute periods) to sixty minutes a day, allowing time for reading aloud and discussion of students' writing.	Objective attained.
3. By the end of the implementation period, the three students whose writing output averaged less than two words per fifteen minute writing period, will be producing at least five times that amount in each writing period of sixty minutes each.	This objective was only partially obtained; all three students improved their writing output, but only one produced five times his previous amount.
4. During a daily writing period of sixty minutes duration, students will routinely confer with one another, having freedom of choice concerning a writing topic, and producing at least one page of writing each.	This objective was nearly attained, as (a) students did routinely confer with one another, (b) had freedom of choice in selecting topics, and (c) fourteen out of seventeen did produce one page of writing every day even though three did not.
5. The time the students are read to will be increased from fifteen minutes once a day to fifteen minutes twice a day, with the types of selections being varied: Poetry, rhymes, jokes, biographies, recipes, family and school stories, newspapers, informational stories, fairy tales, and children's literature.	Objective attained.
6. A folder will be maintained by the author for each child, containing a progressive accumulation of the student's work over the three	Objective attained.

month implementation period and also a conference check-off list, recording for the student: topics written on, durations of the writings, sharing done, and the overall tone of each conference.

Discussion

As four out of the six objectives were met one hundred percent, the author feels that first graders' growth as writers through whole-language strategies was indeed facilitated. It was exceedingly refreshing to note that there was immediate and apparent success upon the implementation of the practicum. By the end of the third day of the program, five out of the six girls had written stories and four of the eleven boys had written. Of the entire class of seventeen, nine had written.

The author was truly amazed to personally document the findings of such authorities as Sylvia Ashton Warner, when she said "Every child has words of his very own" (1963), and Donald Graves (1983) who says "Let students discover information from their own past experiences" and Calkins (1986) who says "Writing time is a time of conferencing, rehearsing topics, listening, reading,

editing, and also pencil to paper activity." When Peter Elbow (1973) maintained that students could write without teachers, the author was skeptical; now, she understands.

The author is especially proud of the attainment of the first objective, which is fifteen out of seventeen students now voluntarily choose to participate in literacy activities. As this is a voluntary thing, students will most likely carry this choice over into other places they go, choosing perhaps to go to the library instead of watching television. Since this did happen over a progressive period of time, it was easy for the actual writing period to be expanded from thirty minutes to sixty minutes per day, as students were consistently spending more time in literacy activities, anyway.

The three students whose writing output was minimal did improve, but not to the extent the author had set for them. All three of them had problems staying on task. The classroom teacher had already arranged for one of them to be tested for learning disabilities, another student was very young in chronological age, and the other was beseiged with family problems. So, a background check was useful for the author in determining why the objective was not met.

Before the implementation of the practicum, two students out of seventeen produced a page of writing a day. At the end of implementation, fourteen out of seventeen students were producing one page (or more) of writing per day. The author feels that this clear sign of progress was quite good despite its falling short of the objective.

The author found, as time went on, that in several cases the quantity of writing did not improve so much as the quality of writing. It was gratifying to see that these students were showing real progress, even if they did not produce more writing.

Reading to the students was a joy, in that they expressed such interest in every type of reading; some even wrote examples of what I read, such as recipes and jokes.

The author feels that the keeping of the folder was essential. No student was ever neglected or lost, as constant use of the folders verified the continuing participation of every student. The checklist was the testimony of the student's involvement.

This practicum not only encouraged writing, but taught responsibility as well. As the students took Winslow the bear home, wrote about their adventures

with him, read their stories in the Author's Chair, conferenced with the author about their writings, and took note that a record was being kept of their writings, they began to feel a sense of authorship and responsibility. They were becoming aware of the original person inside of themselves; self-esteem was slowly but surely being built. It was a true pleasure to see this tremendous growth in first graders, and even more a pleasure to have a part in it!

Recommendations

The author recommends:

1. A Winslow the Bear and the Author's Chair in every first grade classroom so that positive attitudes toward writing can be firmly and pleasantly established.

2. An aide to be responsible for monitoring folders and conferencing with some students (always under the supervision of the teacher).

3. More materials in the reading/writing center, especially those which would encourage roleplaying.

Dissemination

Other teachers in the school have asked about the program, as they have seen the progress the students have made, not only in writing, but in social interaction

and responsibility as well. The classroom teacher the author worked with has shared the program with them at grade level meetings.

The principal was very appreciative of the practicum and praised it highly.

The author plans to present the practicum in a Poster Presentation at the 1990 Nova Summer Institute; she also plans to submit it for publication to some professional journal, perhaps in the form of a photo essay.

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APPENDIX A

CONFERENCE CHECKLIST

Date	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday

\+ = Good Conference

− = Poor Conference

● Engaged in writing activities more than 30 minutes.

▼ Less than 30 minutes

All Class Sharing

APPENDIX B

BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVES RATING SCALE

BEHAVIORAL OBJECTIVES RATING SCALE

Use systematic observation of students' behaviors in class.

Key: 1 = Awful

2 = Poor

3 = Fair

4 = Good

5 = Excellent

	AWFUL	POOR	FAIR	GOOD	EXCELLENT
1. When given free time, ninety percent of the students will voluntarily choose to participate in the reading/writing center, involving themselves in literacy activities, such as storytelling, making books, roleplaying, writing letters and lists, and illustrating stories.					
2. The actual writing period will be expanded from thirty minutes (two fifteen minute periods) to sixty minutes a day, allowing time for reading aloud and discussion of students' writing.					
3. By the end of the implementation period, the three students whose writing output averaged less than two words per fifteen minute writing period, will be producing at least five times that amount in each writing period of sixty minutes each.					
4. During a daily writing period of sixty minutes duration, students will routinely confer with one another, having freedom of choice concerning a writing topic, and producing at least one page of writing each.					

5. The time the students are read to will be increased from fifteen minutes once a day to fifteen minutes twice a day, with the types of selections being varied: poetry, rhymes, jokes, biographies, recipes, family and school stories, newspapers, informational stories, fairy tales, and children's literature.

6. A folder will be maintained by the author for each child, containing a progressive accumulation of the student's work over the three month implementation period and also a Conference Checklist, recording for the student: topics written on, durations of the writings, sharing done, and the overall tone of each conference.